



## Workplace Satisfaction Project Communication Tools

Communication is fundamental to all organizations and relationships. It's about expectations and engagement. It is the means by which all employees deliver their expectations to each other, and the means by which they are engaged with each other toward a common goal. An old saying is that "most human unhappiness comes from unmet expectations"; when employees have clearly understood expectations, and a clear sense of a common goal and their role in it, then communication is succeeding, and they are usually satisfied. When there is a lack of workplace clarity due to poor communication, and expectations are not managed as a result, employees are usually unsatisfied.

Communication relies on frequency and quality. It must be just frequent enough to keep up with evolving shared messages and to keep communication lines open and healthy. Too frequently, and the receivers pay increasingly less attention; too infrequently, and the receivers feel confused and unengaged. Communication quality relies on messages being easily understood, relevant, and concise; messages that are confusing are worse for morale and efficiency than no message at all.

In a world of nearly limitless communication methods, the risk now is in overwhelming employees with sheer complexity and volume of communications. It is good practice for managers to clearly define communication streams and means for the workplace, in order to improve consistency and efficiency.

- All communications have two parties: the sender and the receiver, and each has the other's perspective to consider. Care must be taken by the sender to ensure that the receiver understood the message as intended; emotional intelligence (i.e. skill in understanding one's own emotions, and skill in correctly identifying emotions in others) plays a substantial role in ensuring this. Communications are most effective when there is trust and empathy between the sender and the receiver.
- Face-to-face verbal communications are found to be the most effective and efficient means of communication. They show investment of valuable time, build trust, create stronger bonds, and allow for maximum communicative effectiveness. It is recommended that this be the preferred communication means for employees wherever possible.
- Clarity: A good message is one that is easily and quickly understood. A message that lacks clarity will produce more negative effects than positive, as it disengages and frustrates the receiver.
- Thoughtfulness: A message that is tailored to its audience will be more effective.
- Inclusion: A message should go to all those who are reasonably impacted by its content. Often a significant communication error lies in not anticipating the need or desire of others to receive the message.
- Honesty: A message that is sincere and genuine will be appreciated and considered. A message that is dishonest or self-serving will negatively impact morale and can cause paradoxical disobedience.
- Transparency: A good message will have clear purpose behind the action or decision that is being communicated. Employees will more readily support actions and decisions when they can understand the reasoning and purpose behind them.
- A few strong communication tools are far better than many weak ones.
- Employees should remember that communication is a two-way street, and they should be at least as interested in hearing what others have to say on a topic as they are interested in speaking their own thoughts to others.

- Too often, communications are avoided due to weak conflict management skills on the part of the sender or receiver. They would rather ignore the issue entirely, to their own detriment or others', than have an awkward discussion. The only solution here is for employees to develop conflict management skills and become comfortable engaging in uncomfortable communications.
- Remember that emails do a poor job of conveying emotion; if emotion is at all important to the message, email should be avoided if possible.
- Communication skills are teachable, and are an important part of employee development.
- Skilled communication will invariably break down barriers between individuals and work groups, and therefore enhance engagement and productivity.
- Employees do not only want pleasant or uplifting communications. If something is difficult or unpleasant, and they need to know about it, people generally want the difficult truth to be shared with them – clearly and plainly. Trying to put a positive spin on something that is clearly negative will only hurt trust and morale.
- Regular check-ins with employees are one of the effective supervisor's most valuable tools, as they routinely open communication pathways.
- An 'open door' policy, or any similar policy that invites easy communication, will contribute positively to workplace satisfaction.
- Employees who are sincerely open and approachable invite good communications; employees who project an air of being rushed and impatient will deter good communications.
- Active listening practices demonstrate genuine engagement between sender and receiver, and ensure correct understanding of meaning.
- Anonymous communication tools are not preferred, as they indicate a lack of trust in the workplace environment. It is best if employees trust and value each other enough to speak up as themselves. However, anonymous tools (such as comment boxes or anonymous polls) are useful in a low-trust environment as a means of obtaining direct feedback, inviting solutions, and thereby beginning to build trust.
- Sometimes two employees have such significant communication barriers with each other, they cannot easily overcome them. In those cases, an objective third-party mediator can be an invaluable tool to building trust and starting a conversation.
- Retreats can be a very effective tool for team-based communications. They can be formal off-site retreats, or something as simple as having a meeting in a novel environment, away from usual distractions.
- Communication sharing boards – 'quotes' walls, 'thanks' walls, 'peer recognition' walls – can be an easy means of enhancing employee engagement and trust.